Thomas Yale (1616–1683) of the New Haven Colony

Origin and Family

Born c. 1616. Died March 27, 1683, age 67.

Father: Thomas Yale (c. 1586–1619)
Mother: Anne Lloyd Yale (1595–1659), daughter of George Lloyd, Bishop of Chester and Ann Wilkerson of Norwich
Spouse: Mary Turner (–1704) b. in England and died in New Haven. She was the daughter of Nathaniel, (Capt.) and Margaret (Leachland) Turner.

Children (New Haven Colony)[1]

1. John Yale (1646–)
2. Thomas Yale (1648–1736) (Captain Thomas Yale)
3. Mary Yale (1650–1704)
4. Nathaniel Yale (1652–)

Children (Connecticut Colony)[1]

5. Martha Yale (1655–1670)
6. Abigail Yale (1660–)
7. Hannah Yale (1662–). She married Enos Talmage on May 9, 1682.
8. Elizabeth Yale (1669–1701). She married Joseph Pardee of East Haven on July 30, 1688.

Thomas was just 3 years old when his father died in 1619. In 1624, about nine months before his mother Anne's marriage to Theophilus Eaton, Thomas Yale was formally apprenticed to Eaton, a step that helped secure his future and strengthened the alliance between the two families. Such arrangements were common in seventeenth-century England, where apprenticeship often linked families in anticipation of marriage.[14]

From Rodney Horace Yale[1]: "Thomas Yale married Mary Turner, daughter of Capt. Nathaniel Turner in New Haven, 1645. Capt. Turner was of Lynn Mass in 1630 and removed to New Haven in 1638. He was lost at sea, along with all his crew, in the Phantom, Mr. Lamberton's ship, which sailed from New Haven in January, 1646."

"Thomas Yale came to America in 1637 with his step-father Gov. Eaton, and others. He settled in New Haven as a merchant in 1638 with an estate of £200. After the death of Eaton, he accompanied his mother, his brother, David, and half-sister, Hannah Eaton, back to England in 1659. He returned to New Haven and purchased land in that part of the town which is now North Haven. He held many offices of trust with honor, a credit to himself and a satisfaction of his friends and fellow colonists. He left an estate of £479."[1]

There is some confusion about a reference to Thomas Yale as "Captain Thomas Yale". This title actually applies to his son Thomas. This Thomas has the same name as his father and one of his sons, and all three are in the Yale line of descent. He is sometimes referred to as "Thomas Jr" or "Thomas II", and his father as "Thomas Sr", while his son is usually just Capt. Thomas but sometimes "Thomas III".

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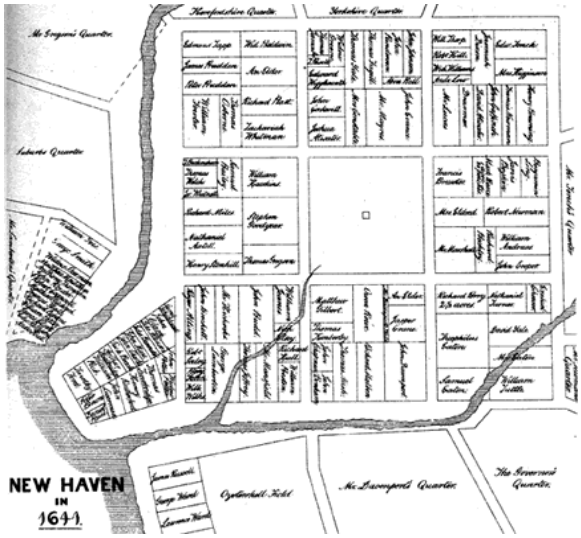
The famous Elihu Yale, namesake of Yale University, was the son of David Yale, Thomas's brother, making Thomas the uncle to Elihu. Therefore, descendants of this Thomas Yale cannot claim Elihu Yale as a direct ancestor, but they are descended from Elihu's father Thomas Sr.

The Crossing to America

Thomas was 21 years old when he and his family migrated to America from Wales. This was an incredibly risky and difficult adventure. The ships were under 200 ft. long and packed with people and animals. In 1637, his step-father Eaton, along with Rev. John Davenport, chartered the good ship Hector to take them and their group to Boston. See The Voyage of the Hector for details of this great adventure.

After a trying crossing, the Hector sailed into Boston harbor on June 26, 1637.

The New Haven Colony



Soon after their arrival, Eaton and Davenport went into the wilderness to found their colony of New Haven. Thomas joined them as the signers of the colony's "Fundamental Agreement" on June 4, 1639.[12]

Thomas's step-father Theophilus Eaton was made Governor of the colony. They created a one-half mile square tract for the town, which was divided into nine squares.

Thomas Yale owned a lot in Square 2 (top middle on the diagram).[4] However, it appears he never lived there. "Marrying a daughter of Capt. Turner, he engaged in animal husbandry and appears to have made his home at a farm some miles north of the town-plot".[2]

Eaton and Ann Lloyd Yale were the most wealthy family in the colony, and they had a very large Tudor-style home built on their estate:[15]

The House of Theophilus Eaton in New Haven, c. 1672. It is said to have had 20 fireplaces.

According to *Ancient Town Records*[13], Thomas seems to have fully embraced the Puritan lifestyle in New Haven. His brother David found it too rigid and demanding, so he moved his family to Boston and became a successful merchant. Thomas, on the other hand, returned to England in 1657 only to accompany his mother Anne. Anne had become disillusioned with church policies and eventually suffered excommunication. For Thomas to once again leave the safety and comfort of Plas Grono for the new world and the spartan existence at New Haven is compelling. He again made the dangerous journey to New Haven in spite of his mother's humiliation and his brother's rejection of Puritanism. When he returned to New Haven, he purchased land in 1660 in that part of the town which is now North Haven.[2]

In 17th-century New England, it was common for poor young women to hire themselves as bound servants for a year or less, exchanging labor for food, clothing, shelter, and modest wages. In December 1659, Thomas Yale became involved in a legal case when his servant, Ann Small, attempted to negotiate marriage with a local man without his consent or her mother's, both in direct violation of New Haven Colony law. The court found that she had also lied and had stolen from Thomas, and it imposed fines and the possibility of corporal punishment for these offenses. Thomas asked the court to be "rid of her", but the court refused, noting that presently there was no other place for her. The secular court needed to balance the Puritan moral code with practical concerns for ensuring that the young woman never became a burden to the town.[13]

In 1660, he was part of a town committee that disputed the absorption of New Haven into the state of Connecticut. The colony had hoped to remain independent from the state, but court proceedings in 1661 confirmed that New Haven was included in the royal patent for the territory of Connecticut.[2]

At the end of 1665, the Colony of New Haven ceased to exist and was absorbed into the Colony of Connecticut. Thomas and some others were assigned January 1665/6 to collect "the country rate for Connecticut." He took the freeman's oath to Connecticut on 8 May 1666.[6]

In Sept 1667, Sept 1668 and Sept 1675, Mr. Yale and others were appointed to take the list of men's estates, which would be used by the town to assess rates.[7]

Mr. Thomas Yale senior & Lt. Thomas Munson were chosen to serve as Deputies to the Connecticut Colonial Court. He had also been chosen as an alternate Deputy in 1664.[8]

In February 1680, he was granted an additional 56 acres in the third division of land in the New Haven Colony.[15]

The Yale line has been in America since 1637, nearly a century and a half before the formation of the United States. Because Thomas Yale lived most of his life in America, he is the first male ancestor in the Yale line that can be truly described as American.

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Typical Early Settler Home in New Haven

End of Life

Thomas Yale died in New Haven, Conn. on March 27, 1683, age 67.[5]

An inventory of his estate was taken on 7 May 1683, and valued at £479:05:03. A county court, held on 24 June 1684, made an adjustment, since the widow and children could not reach an agreement.[9] Thomas wrote no will, but had verbally declared his intentions. The estate was divided by the court among the widow Mary, sons John, Thomas and Nathan, daughters Abigail Yale, Elizabeth Yale, Mary wife of Joseph Ives, and the wife of Enos Talmage.[10] The inventory contained house, barn, orchard, land and meadow valued at £238, third division land (number of acres not listed) valued at £4, wearing apparel, household goods, almost no pieces of farming equipment, but a good number of animals (including bee hives). He also had a pair of spectacles. A bible and a few old books were listed.[11]

As a citizen of the town and a member of the church, Thomas Yale participated in colonial life not as a superior or overlord, but simply as one member of the community.[12] With him, the family's long line of landed-gentry privilege came to a close. His descendants entered the ranks of ordinary American colonists—farmers who lived by their own labor and received no deferential treatment based on title or lineage. Prosperity from this point forward depended on initiative, self-reliance, and hard work.

In 1718, trustees of the Collegiate College of Connecticut relocated the school to New Haven to the parcel of land formerly owned by Thomas Yale. This relocation was part of a strategic effort to secure a significant donation from the wealthy merchant Elihu Yale, which included renaming the school to Yale College.[17]

Research Notes

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FamilySearch ID: LR9W-7J7
Wikipedia: Thomas Yale (New Haven Colony)
Find a Grave Memorial: 41335178

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